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# APPENDIX G - RIVERSIDE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS; DISCUSSION OF PLANNING ISSUES

## **Area 1 - Mahoney Blocks** **Proposed: Special Residence C -X District**

*Existing Zoning District.* The blocks are currently zoned Residence C -3. It is a high density multifamily district that allows housing and institutional uses. Commercial uses are not permitted. An FAR of 3.0 and a height of 120 feet (potentially modified by state tidelands restrictions) are allowed. Yards by formula are required. The Residence C -3 District has been traditionally the university campus district and is the district that regulates development at the core of the Harvard and MIT campuses. The blocks have been zoned C -3 since 1943. (n.b. Wherever reference is made in this document to zoning districts, it should be understood that the regulations applicable in the past may be different from those applicable today, although the district name has not changed.)

Chapter 40A (state law governing local zoning authority) does not allow Cambridge to prohibit university or other institutional uses in a Residence C -3 district (See attached Regulation of University Uses flow chart to understand how Cambridge does regulate those uses). However, Cambridge has created eight Institutional Overlay Districts to regulate institutions within the limits imposed by Chapter 40A. The Mahoney Blocks are not within any of those Overlay Districts. The nearest is the Harvard, Radcliffe, Lesley

*Institutional Overlay District.* Its boundary encompasses the River Houses and Peabody Terrace portions of the Harvard campus but stops at Akron Street. The fact that the Mahoney Blocks are not within the Institutional Overlay District indicates that at the time of the establishment of the District (1981), the Mahoney Blocks were not, as they are not now, in active institutional use. At the same time, the fact that the Blocks are designated Residence C -3 allows institutional or university uses on them, subject only to the dimensional limits imposed by the district.

*Existing Development Character.* The site is entirely owned by Harvard University. It is currently occupied by a retail nursery and garden center and has been so used for decades. The current use is non conforming in the district. Only a few small buildings exist on the southern parcel, with the tallest probably no higher than 20-25 feet. The FAR is probably no greater than 0.10 on that block. Some parking unrelated to the nursery use occurs on the eastern edge of the southern parcel.

The Blocks are surrounded by an urban environments having quite varied urban character. Therefore, an appropriate development policy direction for this site may not be immediately self-evident. To the north is Peabody Terrace, a housing complex for mar-

ried Harvard Graduate students, which in scale and form is typical of the kind of development the Residence C -3 district was meant to permit before a height limit was imposed in 1997. The tallest structures are 180 feet or more in height but the complex is only about half as dense (in terms of allowed Gross Floor Area) as the Residence C -3 district allows.

To the west the blocks are open to Memorial Drive, the riverfront greenway and the river itself.

To the south is a dense complex of industrial buildings of some architectural interest. Their scale is generally fairly modest with the exception of the power plant itself, which is about 70 feet in height; other buildings are in the 35-45 foot range. Existing FAR is about 1.20.

To the east is a neighborhood of wood frame three story residential buildings, fairly typical of the residential Riverside neighborhood generally, if somewhat more densely built up. While not higher than 35 feet with one exception, the residences have an average FAR of perhaps 1.0

***Proposed District.*** The Committee has chosen the residential neighborhood to the east as the starting point for formulating its recommendation. The new district (Special Residence C -X District) is meant to serve the following objectives:

- Residential development at a low density (both as to height and FAR)
- Increased amount of open space to maintain the current sense of openness between the existing neighborhood and the river (through low FAR and building height, but also through a high open space requirement and extra wide yards).
- Prohibition of dormitories (and other intensive institutional uses). Such a prohibition is only possible if the district is residential with a dwelling density of one

unit per 1,200 square feet or more of lot area (the criteria established by the General Court by which Cambridge can regulate institutional uses in residential neighborhoods).

The Committee recommends a variation of the current Residence C district, with an FAR of 0.6, a height of 20-24 feet, and 20 foot setbacks for all yards. Single, two-family, multifamily and townhouse development is permitted. Thirty percent of the site must be at grade Green Area Open Space.

The Committee's preferred use for both blocks is as a public park. Recognizing that goal cannot be achieved through zoning, the Committee included certain special permit provisions in the proposed zoning to entice a private property owner through development incentives to partially fulfill that objective. By special permit the new district allows an FAR of 1.0, a height of 35 feet, reduction of yard requirements to zero in most cases, and allows transfer of development potential from the Western Avenue block to the block abutting Peabody Terrace. Such additional benefits are only allowed if the south block is devoted almost exclusively to open space accessible to the general public.

***Alternatives Considered.*** A number of alternate zoning schemes were examined and in the end rejected.

Harvard University presented the details of the proposed museum use: one building on each block, connected underground across Hingham Street. The proposed project has an FAR of less than 2.0, a height of fifty-five feet, at-grade landscaped setbacks of forty feet around all sides of the buildings, constituting about 50% of the area of the Blocks. The parking is underground. The majority of the Committee considered the proposal too dense although some members did not object to the use itself.

Alternate massing sketches were also presented by the University illustrating possible housing development of the Blocks at FAR densities ranging down from 3.0 to ca. 1.75. The majority of Committee members rejected such schemes based on the height and scale of the illustrated development.

The Committee also considered variations on the recommended special district that would have allowed retail use in addition to housing. However, any non-residential district would automatically have to allow university uses and dormitories by state law. The dormitory possibility was not acceptable to most Committee members. On the other hand retail uses of the right kind (i.e. small in scale and serving the neighborhood or users of the riverfront) were generally thought to be appropriate. Nevertheless, in the end, the decision was not to open the door to dormitory use or large scale retail operations (e.g. Osco Drug) or other inappropriate retail activity no matter what its scale.

***Applicability of Growth Policies.*** The Growth Policies identified by the Planning Board as having some relevance to this proposal are discussed below.

Land Use Policy 5 suggests that institutional expansion should be limited to existing areas of institutional use or suitable abutting areas identified as appropriate as indicated by inclusion within an Institutional Overlay District. These blocks have been owned by Harvard University for decades and have been zoned C-3, which in part has played a role in the zoning ordinance as a campus zone, for forty years or more. They have been in retail use for a similar length of time (excluding the parking lot on Western Avenue). The site was excluded from the adjacent Institutional Overlay District adopted in 1981, indicating that the city anticipated high density housing (e.g. 808 Memorial Drive) at this site.

Land Use Policy 6 suggests that densities

allowed on the central campuses of the universities should be sufficient to accommodate needed expansion and thus not encourage expansion of academic activities into new territory in neighborhoods and commercial districts. Recent citywide rezoning efforts have generally eschewed changes to the Residence C-3 district's regulations (establishment of a height limit being the only recent exception) for this very reason. Considerable infill has been occurring on both the Harvard University and MIT campuses consistent with the policy objective. On the other hand, large areas of the two campuses constitute cultural and environmental amenities of both local and national significance that cannot be maintained with unrestricted building expansion. The Mahoney Blocks present the competing policy options fairly clearly. In the end the Committee recommendation asserts that the campus should stop at Akron Street and that development on these blocks should be more clearly a part of the community at large in use, form and spirit.

Institutional Policy 53 addresses the loss of tax revenue through conversion of tax paying property to tax exempt uses. The Blocks' current tax liability is probably rather modest given the limited activity now on the site. Luxury housing construction within the limits of the Residence C -3 district would clearly dramatically increase revenue to the city. Lowering the density of permitted tax-paying uses would likely reduce that revenue stream somewhat. Conversion to academic use would take the property off the tax rolls.

Urban Design Policy 59 urges that land use and zoning regulations reflect the city's urban design and environmental objectives. The purpose of this rezoning exercise is to define those objectives for this specific location in 2002, sixty years following the previous choice. Discussion above suggests that several, widely varying urban design visions are possible at this location. Each has merit but with quite different physical implications.

Urban Design Policy 62 addresses the need to provide adequate transitions between differing scales and kinds of development. The Mahoney Blocks provide a textbook example of a complex urban environment where many considerations come into play when establishing the appropriate regulatory formula for future development. The Committee has chosen to treat some past development (e.g. Peabody Terrace) as an aberration not to be transitioned from. Its choice is made to protect the existing older residential neighborhood by extending and completing it with building forms of similar use, height and design.

Open Space Policy 69 identifies private open space as a valuable asset to the city as a whole, whether it is accessible or not, and urges its protection. It also suggests that active public use of such spaces should be encouraged where possible. The policy grows out of an appreciation of features such as the visually and sometimes physically accessible lawns and gardens of the Harvard River Houses, Harvard Yard, and Holyoke Plaza in Harvard Square as well as the accumulated leafy back yards found on the interior of many residential blocks in the city. That policy idea might be extended here to include the open, landscaped feeling that is inherent in the operation of a garden center like Mahoney's. Implied in the statement is a caution that the value of open space is not always in its immediate physical accessibility and that, as alluded to above, increased construction on campus sites carries with it a significant cost in the loss of such open space amenities. It also suggests that leveraging private development to secure publicly accessible open space should be considered wherever feasible. This policy, in this particular context, suggests the need to look at any proposal on the Mahoney Blocks in a much wider context while focusing in on the very small details of the regulations being proposed.

***Previous Planning Initiatives.*** In the mid 1980s, the Planning Board expressed concern about the scale of development allowed in the Residence C -3 district as it might be played out on these Blocks. At the time the district was even more permissive as development was then not subject to any height limit. The Board advanced a proposal to rezone the blocks to a Residence C -2A district designation (FAR of 2.5 and a height of 60 feet) but no final action was taken.

The Citywide Growth Management Advisory Committee selected this Area 1 and the adjacent Area 5 for review with an eye toward adjustments in zoning appropriate to achieving an adequate transition between the existing neighborhood environment and the potential scale of development allowed in the Residence C -3 district on the Mahoney Blocks.

The Riverside Neighborhood Study also identified the need for review of the zoning applicable to this corner of the neighborhood.

## **Area 2 - NStar Site**

### **Proposed: Special Residence C -Y District**

***Existing Zoning District.*** The site is currently zoned Office 3. This is a high density office and multifamily district that allows general office and research and development uses in addition to housing and institutional activities. Retail uses are not permitted (nor is the power plant, which is not a allowed use anywhere in the city). An FAR of 3.0 for housing and 2.0 for office uses applies, with a height of 120 feet (potentially modified by state tidelands restrictions) for residential uses and 90 feet for all others. Yards by formula are required. The site was zoned high density business in 1943, rezoned to high density office in 1961. The Office-3 designation was created in the mid 1970s when the Zoning Ordinance established a series of

three office districts from what had previously been a single district.

The site is not located within any Institutional Overlay District.

**Existing Development Character.** The site is densely built up with a functioning steam generating power plant and ancillary buildings that have served the utility function in the past. Some of the ancillary buildings are not actively used now and most of them are no longer needed to service the power plant. The current power generation use is non-conforming. Most buildings are likely non-conforming as to setbacks, which are determined by formula, because they are at or close to the property line. The FAR of existing buildings is around 1.20.

The site abuts Area 1 to the north. To the east, other ancillary NStar industrial buildings are present in the Blackstone Block. That entire block was recently rezoned from Office 3 to Residence C -1. To the south is the 1970s vintage Technology Center office building, with a height of about 70 feet. To the west, the site is open to Memorial Drive, the riverfront greenway and the river.

Many of the buildings on the site have architectural merit or historical interest.

**Proposed District.** The Committee has recommended a new district (Special Residence C - Y District) meant to serve the following objectives:

- Residential development at a low density (both as to height and FAR) should existing structures be demolished or at a higher density through the conversion of those existing non-residential buildings to housing.
- Prohibition of dormitories (and other intensive institutional uses), which can only be accomplished if the district is low density residential. The district has the same dimensional and use characteristics of the proposed zoning for Area 1 without any of the

special permit options: an FAR of 0.6, a height of 20-24 feet, and 20 foot setbacks for all yards. Single, two-family, multifamily and townhouse development is permitted. Thirty percent of the site must be at grade Green Area Open Space.

**Alternatives Considered.** A number of alternate zoning schemes were examined by the Committee.

Alternate approaches were considered that would have allowed higher density and greater height on portions of the site (FAR of 2.0, height of 85 feet). Those options were intended to encourage partial redevelopment of the site to secure open space on it, and public access through it, from Blackstone Street to the river. As in Area 1 there was also an interest in allowing limited retail activity to serve both the neighborhood and people out for a stroll along the river promenades.

Again as in Area 1, potential dormitory use was of concern. Because any non-residential district must allow university functions and dormitories, a non-residential district was unacceptable to most Committee members. The Committee was also not strongly in favor of more development on the site but was generally in favor of residential reuse of the existing buildings.

There was considerable early discussion of the possibility of building out the University museum program, proposed for the Mahoney Blocks, on this site through conversion of existing buildings. The feasibility of such a reuse (or any other reuse) may be constrained by the continued operation of the steam power plant, the steam from which is needed by the University.

***Applicability of Growth Policies.*** The Growth Policies having some relevance to this proposal are discussed below.

Land Use Policy 5 suggests that institutional expansion should be limited to existing areas of institutional use or suitable abutting areas identified as appropriate by inclusion within an Institutional Overlay District. This site is not within an Overlay District nor adjacent to any university campus. The Committee did explore possible university museum use on this site but strongly objected to dormitories.

Land Use Policies 9 and 10 speak to creative reuse of older industrial districts with the encouragement of mixed use and a significant component of housing. Land Use Policy 12 encourages the preservation of the city's historic resources. The recommended zoning encourages preservation of the historic buildings (as they are already more dense than the new district would allow) and their reuse to housing (particularly through special provisions recently adopted that ease the conversion of industrial buildings to housing). It does exclude, however, the option of a wider range of commercial uses. Land Use Policy 8 relates the density of development to the availability of transit service. This site, now zoned as one of the highest density mixed use districts in the city, is poorly served by bus or other non-auto transportation services. The rezoning would significantly lower the overlay density of development permitted and prohibit the highest traffic generating uses (i.e. office and retail activities) from this car-dependent location.

Urban Design Policy 59 urges that land use and zoning regulations reflect the city's urban design and environmental objectives. Again this rezoning exercise is an attempt to define what those objectives should be at this specific location in 2002, sixty years after high density development was anticipated at this site. The recommended zoning provides powerful incentives to retain the existing

buildings and reuse them for housing (or their continued use for the activities now present in them).

Urban Design Policy 62 addresses the need to provide adequate transitions between differing scales and kinds of development. With the preservation of the existing building pattern on the site, the existing building relationships with its neighbors are retained. The Office 3 district would allow substantial redevelopment of the site (perhaps subject to Historical Commission review) and the construction of buildings as tall as 120 feet, or twelve residential stories. Suitable transitions would be more difficult to achieve in those circumstances.

Open Space Policy 69 identifies private open space, whether accessible or not, as a valuable amenity to the city and urges its protection. There is no such open space on this site currently, although there are open areas for parking and circulation. However, the establishment of public pedestrian connections through this site to the river and the establishment of publicly accessible open space and plazas within the existing building complex were considered desirable by the Committee; the proposed zoning, however, does not provide any incentive to make that happen.

***Previous Planning Initiatives.*** Changes adopted through the Citywide Rezoning Petition reduced the density of non-residential development in the Office 3 district from 3.0 to 2.0 and the height permitted for non-residential buildings from 120 feet to 90 feet.

### **Area 3 - Western, Kinnaird, Green, and Franklin**

#### **Proposed: Residence C -1 District**

***Existing Zoning District.*** Area 3 is currently zoned Residence C -2. This is a medium density multifamily residential district that allows all forms of housing and institutional uses. An FAR of 1.75 is permitted with a

height of 85. Yards by formula are required. Area 3 has been so zoned in its current configuration since 1961. Prior to 1961 portions were zoned C -2 as far back as 1943. Other portions along the River Street corridor were zoned Business A from 1943 to 1961. Existing retail or other commercial activity in the area is now non-conforming.

The area is not located within any Institutional Overlay District.

**Existing Development Character.** Area 3 is substantially residential in character. Sites previously used for industry along Franklin Street have mostly been converted to housing. Some ground floor retail activity, probably established when that corridor was commercially zoned, continues along River Street. A large parking lot fronting on Green Street, owned by the YMCA, is the largest undeveloped site within the area.

In scale, the residential pattern is split between low scaled wood frame construction (about 35 feet high) at moderate to high density. Masonry high-density housing is distributed between late 19th and early 20th century apartment buildings of four or five stories and higher-rise apartment construction dating from the last forty years. These buildings are usually about 85 feet in height. The average density of occupied sites within Area 3 is 1.20.

The area is bordered by the Central Square commercial district to the east and neighborhood scaled residential development elsewhere.

**Proposed District.** The Committee has recommended designation of the area as a Residence C -1 district, the prevailing zone in the abutting neighborhoods to the east and west. An FAR of 0.75 is permitted with a height of 35. Yards, by formula, are required. The density allowed is one unit per 1,500 square feet of lot area. All residential uses are permitted but institutional uses are

severely restricted.

The Committee has made its recommendation in order to preserve the significant inventory of low scale frame housing now common in the district, and to prohibit further erosion of that character through redevelopment to larger scaled buildings. The large scaled, high-rise masonry apartment buildings already present in Area 3 are not the norm for future development desired by the Committee. In neighborhoods with varied development characteristics it is not unusual to establish a zoning norm less than the greatest intensity of development exhibited in the district.

**Alternatives Considered.** Several alternatives to the Residence C -1 designation were considered. All involved the Residence C-2B district. That district differs from Residence C-2 in that the permitted height is forty-five feet rather than eighty-five feet and special green area requirements apply to some required yards. Those alternatives were:

- Rezoning the entire area Residence C -2B
- Rezoning the portion of the Area between Franklin and Green Street to Residence C -2B
- Rezoning the half block abutting Green Street to Residence C -2B.

There was some sentiment on the Committee favorable to the notion that portions of Area 3 close to Central Square and close to subway service could support higher density housing for urban design, housing and transportation policy reasons. The larger scaled and taller buildings present tend to be concentrated in the blocks nearer to Central Square. In the end the Committee preferred to maintain for the future the generally prevailing neighborhood building norm reflected by the limitations established in the Residence C -1 district.

***Applicability of Growth Policies.*** Relevant Growth Policies are described below.

Land Use Policy 1 suggests that existing residential neighborhoods having an identifiable built character should be preserved by directing future change in that same direction. Housing Policy 26 urges that existing neighborhoods be preserved at their current density, scale and character. Identifying "current density, scale and character" and "identifiable built character" is not always simple when, as is typical of most Cambridge neighborhoods, development patterns shift from lot to lot and street to street. As is true here, and in Mid-Cambridge and Cambridgeport, there is often a mixture of low buildings that can be either moderately or very densely built up on their lots, as well as taller buildings of uniformly high density. The task at hand is to select which of those clusters of characteristics (setbacks, unit density, height, FAR) should be chosen to shape future development. The Committee has chosen to limit future development to moderate density, low scaled housing, which is compatible with much of what already exists and which is predominant in the adjacent neighborhood blocks.

Land Use Policy 8 relates the density of development to the availability of transit service. A reasonable argument can be made that the portions of Area 3 close to Central Square should be developed to higher densities.

Urban Design Policy 59 urges that land use and zoning regulations reflect the city's urban design and environmental objectives. Current zoning policy has been in place for forty years or more. Circumstances have changed and there is now an opportunity to take a second look.

Urban Design Policy 62 addresses the need to provide adequate transitions between differing scales and kinds of development. The higher densities permitted now in the

Area 3 complicate any effort to develop compatibly with adjacent neighborhood blocks.

***Previous Planning Initiatives.*** In the mid 1990s the Planning Board considered the possibility of recommending a similar zone change to the City Council. Various configurations of Residence C -1 and C -2B were discussed. However, no specific recommendation was made at that time.

#### **Area 4 - River Street and a Portion of Western Avenue Proposed: Neighborhood Business District**

***Existing Zoning District.*** Area 4 consists of one block on Western Avenue between Jay and Howard Streets and several blocks along River Street from Williams Street in the east and Putnam Avenue on the west. The two areas are currently zoned Business A. This is the highest density neighborhood business district; it allows a range of retail and office uses in addition to all forms of housing. An FAR of 1.0 for retail and office uses and 1.75 for housing are permitted. Commercial uses are limited to a height of 35 feet; housing is permitted at 45 feet. Yards, by formula, are required for housing but only a 20 foot rear yard is required for commercial uses. Area 4 has been similarly zoned in both areas since 1943.

The area is not located within any Institutional Overlay District.

***Existing Development Character.*** While a wide range of commercial uses are permitted, both areas are predominately residential in character. The retail activities that are present tend to be located in small commercial extensions onto older wood frame residential buildings. Few sites are in exclusive commercial use. The actual pattern of development differs little from the residential lots abutting in the neighborhood. Most structures are used residentially, wood framed, about 35 feet tall, and freestanding on their own lot.



The FAR density is about 0.97.

Area 4 is bordered by Area 3 to the north and east and the residential neighborhoods of Riverside and Cambridgeport elsewhere.

***Proposed District.*** The Committee has recommended the creation of a new residential/retail district that would be the retail analog to the Residence C -1 residential district and the Office 1 office district: i.e. an FAR of 0.75, a height of 35 feet, yards by formula, and a dwelling unit density of one unit per 1,500 square feet of lot. However, retail activity would be permitted in a building containing residential uses, but only on the first floor or basement. It could constitute no more than 40% of the GFA of the structure.

The Committee has made its recommendation in order to preserve the significant inventory housing and freestanding buildings that characterize these areas, while offering the opportunity to expand small neighborhood-serving commercial activity along the streets. The proposed regulations are intended to allow retail activity at a neighborhood scale without encouraging the transformation of the street from a residential extension of abutting blocks to a full fledged retail district of streetwall buildings and large stores.

***Alternatives Considered.*** Two alternates were considered: retention of the existing district or rezoning to Residence C -1. The Committee viewed the new district as a reasonable compromise to preserve existing housing while allowing limited retail activity in the form that currently exists along River Street and Western Avenue.

***Applicability of Growth Policies.*** Relevant Growth Policies are described below.

Land Use Policy 1 suggests that existing residential neighborhoods having an identifiable built character should be preserved by directing future change in that same direction.

Along River Street and this portion of Western Avenue the current zoning regulations would permit their evolution from relatively seamless extensions of the residential blocks immediately abutting, to commercial streets in the image of Cambridge Street and Massachusetts Avenue in Agassiz and North Cambridge. The Committee does not wish to see such a wholesale transformation of these streets. Continuation of the present into the future is desired. Housing Policy 26 makes very much the same point.

Economic Development Policies 47 and 48 address the need to strengthen and reenforce the character of existing retail districts rather than expanding them. It is the Committee's view that these BA districts are not now retail districts within the meaning of these two policy statements. Only limited and very modest retail expansion is desired here. The primary goal is to retain a significant housing presence in these two locations.

Urban Design Policy 59 urges that land use and zoning regulations reflect the city's urban design and environmental objectives. Current zoning policy has been in place for sixty years. While to date that zoning has not fostered the creation of a dense commercial street, if that is not the city's policy intent the current zoning should be modified.

Urban Design Policy 62 addresses the need to provide adequate transitions between differing scales and kinds of development. Transitions are very difficult to manage between commercial uses and the immediately abutting residential housing in narrow commercial districts like the Business A district along River Street. Noise, trash, odors, parking lots, etc. all can have a negative impact on nearby residences with little physical room to buffer them. In this particular context, lowering the intensity of potential commercial activity would be the best way to ensure minimal conflict.

**Previous Planning Initiatives.** In the mid 1990s the height premium granted to housing in the Business A district was reduced from 85 feet to 45 feet. In addition special green area requirements were imposed on certain yards in the Residence C -2B district, which serves as the dimensional guide to residential development in a Business A district.

Area 5 - Putnam and Western Avenue,  
Banks, Elmer and Hingham Streets  
Proposed: Residence C -1 District

**Existing Zoning District.** Area 5 is currently zoned Residence C -3. It is a high density multifamily district that allows housing and institutional uses. Commercial uses are not permitted. An FAR of 3.0 and a height of 120 feet is permitted. Yards, by formula, are required. The zone has been traditionally the university campus district and is the district regulating development at the core of the Harvard and MIT campuses. The site has been zoned C -3 since 1961. From 1943 to 1961 the entire area had been zoned Residence C -1, except that the frontage on Western Avenue was designated Business A.

The area is not located within any Institutional Overlay District.

**Existing Development Character.** The area is nearly entirely residential in use. The prevailing development type consists of freestanding wood frame structures two to three stories high. Only one large multifamily structure is present on a previously commercial site redeveloped to housing in the 1980s. While individual structures tend to be modest in size, the built density is relatively high at 1.14.

The area is bordered by Area 1 (the Mahoney Blocks) to the west, the parking garage and low rise elements of Peabody Terrace to the north, Putnam Gardens public housing and residential neighborhood blocks to the east, and the NStar facilities and some housing on the Blackstone block across Western Avenue to the south.

**Proposed District.** The Committee has recommended designation of the area as a Residence C -1 district, the prevailing zone in the abutting neighborhood blocks to the east. An FAR of 0.75 is permitted with a height of 35 feet. Yards, by formula, are required. The density allowed is one unit per 1,500 square feet of lot area. All residential uses are permitted but institutional uses are severely restricted.

The Committee has made its recommendation in order to preserve the scale of the present neighborhood.

**Alternatives Considered.** The Committee did not consider alternate approaches.

**Applicability of Growth Policies.** Relevant Growth Policies are discussed below.

Land Use Policy 1 suggests that existing residential neighborhoods having an identifiable built character should be preserved by directing future change in that same direction. Housing Policy 26 urges that existing neighborhoods be preserved at their current density, scale and character. Existing "scale and character" and "identifiable built character" are easily matched in spirit with the dimensional provisions of the recommended Residence C-1 district. However, the density of development is actually higher than allowed in the C-1 zone, partly because many lots are small, setbacks are modest and probably uniformly non-conforming even under the C-3 formula provisions. This is not unusual in Cambridge neighborhoods. A survey of the the density of development in the blocks in the Riverside neighborhood already zoned C-1 will show a wide range from .71 to .94 (in those blocks recently analyzed by CDD). The Committee believes that the bundle of dimensional requirements of the Residence C-1 district more closely reflects the desirable development pattern in this neighborhood for the limited future development that is possible there and for

any future redevelopment of currently built up sites. It is the kind of policy choice the city has made in many very similar neighborhoods in the eastern part of the city.

Urban Design Policy 59 urges that land use and zoning regulations reflect the city's urban design and environmental objectives. Current zoning policy has been in place for forty years. When put in place in 1961 it was a clear choice to turn away from the neighborhood as it had developed in the 19th century (and as was reflected in the C -1 district then regulating development in the area) in favor, it would appear, of future redevelopment of its blocks to much higher density and perhaps as a location for expansion of the University campus. This is an opportunity to take a second look at that choice made four decades ago.

Urban Design Policy 62 addresses the need to provide adequate transitions between differing scales and kinds of development. The higher densities permitted now in the Area 4 would complicate any effort to develop compatibly with adjacent neighborhood blocks across Putnam Avenue in the event of significant redevelopment of lots in this small cluster of blocks.

***Previous Planning Initiatives.*** In the mid 1990s the Planning Board recommended this change to the City Council. Testimony at the public hearing suggested delaying any action until a zoning recommendation could be made for the Mahoney Blocks as well. No action was therefore taken.

**Area 6 - Banks, Grant, Athens, Mt. Auburn and Cowperthwaite Streets  
Proposed: Special Residence C -Z District**

***Existing Zoning District.*** Area 6 is currently zoned Residence C -3. It is a high density multifamily district that allows housing and institutional uses. Commercial uses are not allowed. An FAR of 3.0 and a height of 120 feet is permitted. Yards by formula are

required. The zone has traditionally served as the university campus district in the Zoning Ordinance and is the district regulating development at the core of the Harvard and MIT campuses. The site has been so zoned since 1943.

The portion of the area between Grant and Cowperthwaite Streets is located within the Harvard, Radcliffe, Lesley Institutional Overlay District.

***Existing Development Character.*** The area is entirely residential in use where buildings are present on lots. Two large parking lots owned by Harvard University are representative of the other prominent use present. The prevailing development consists of freestanding wood frame structures, two to three stories high. Lot sizes and lot widths are commonly substandard (ca 4,000 square feet, sometimes less, with a width of 40 feet). The overall density is about 0.75 when the few larger apartment buildings are excluded.

The area is bordered to the west and south by Harvard University dormitories. They are generally large in scale, moderately to quite dense and ranging from 40 to 110 feet in height as they directly abut Area 6. To the east across Banks Street are standard Riverside residential blocks. To the north across Mt. Auburn Street is the Harvard Square business district where the St. Paul's Church complex and the Reversible Collar Factory building are the immediate neighbors.

***Proposed District.*** The Committee has recommended designation of the area as a new district that would be a variation on the Residence C district. It would have the usual Residence C dimensional provisions: an FAR of 0.60 with a height of 35 feet; yards by formula; one dwelling unit per 1,800 square feet of lot area; and a 36% open space requirement. All residential uses are permitted but institutional uses are severely restricted.

The special features of the district are intended to provide incentives (and some explicit restrictions) to encourage a traditional pattern of development on the large vacant parking lots that front on Cowperthwaite and Grant Streets, among others. The objective is to see housing with two or three units constructed in regular rows along existing streets, infilling vacant spaces in a traditional manner. To prevent large townhouse or multifamily structures, each lot in the district can only have one principal structure on it, containing no more than two units, and containing no more than 3,000 square feet of Gross Floor area. Variations on this kind of limitation are now in force in Residence A and B districts. These limitations require subdivision of large lots if the full, or nearly full, development potential of those lots is to be achieved.

To encourage those subdivided lots to be located on streets (fairly easy to achieve in this context) dimensional requirements for lot size, setbacks, lot frontage, FAR and dwelling units are relaxed if a lot fronts on a street within a specific width range and the building is in close proximity to the street. The relaxed standards would apply to the smaller subdivided lots, but the general density limits of the original large lot could never be exceeded.

The recommendation would eliminate the Institutional Overlay District now present on the Cowperthwaite/Grant Streets block.

***Alternatives Considered.*** Harvard University, owner of many of the frame houses in the area and of the large parking lots, developed a schematic zoning proposal in consultation with immediately affected neighbors in the Banks Street area. It suggested new housing construction well below the density allowed in the C -3 district, with building heights varying from 35 to 60 feet depending on existing building context, and with a detailed set of architectural guidelines to ensure that new construction would be compatible in design with the existing character of residen-

tial buildings already in the area. The new housing would not be for undergraduates. The proposal was presented to the Committee, most of whose members considered it too dense and too permissive as to height.

Both the standard Residence C district and the standard Residence C -1 district were considered as options. Strong incentives to replicate current building patterns on these city blocks and to secure some additional open space were a strong desire of most members of the Committee; the special C district was therefore the preference.

***Applicability of Growth Policies.*** Relevant Growth Policies are described below.

Land Use Policy 1 suggests that existing residential neighborhoods having an identifiable built character should be preserved by directing future change in that same direction. Housing Policy 26 urges that existing neighborhoods be preserved at their current density, scale and character. Existing "scale and character" and "identifiable built character" is quite different from that possible with new development constructed within the building envelope permitted by the Residence C -3 district. A Residence C, C -1 or the proposed Special Residence C -Z district each would more precisely reflect the character of existing development in Area 6. Preservation of any semblance of the small scaled residential neighborhood that exists today, in a somewhat tattered form, cannot be assured in the long run if development is guided by the present C -3 district regulations.

Land Use Policy 5 suggests that institutional expansion should be limited to existing areas of institutional use or suitable abutting areas identified as appropriate as indicated by inclusion within an Institutional Overlay District. Since 1943 this entire area has been zoned Residence C -3 (at least until 1981 the de facto institutional district in the Zoning Ordinance). It is under that zoning that uni-

versity campus expansion has progressed east through Riverside in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, replacing housing similar to those seen now in Area 6 with large dormitories and other student housing. Harvard University has for a long time been a major owner of land and buildings in Area 6, suggesting an intent to keep open the option of expanding university functions into it if that proved desirable. In 1981, when policies affecting institutions were again comprehensively studied by the City, the Residence C -3 district was retained and unaltered but the newly created Harvard, Radcliffe, Lesley Institutional Overlay District was only applied to the Cowperthwaite to Grant Streets block in the area. In 1981 the City was not specifically urging the preservation of the Area 6 as it was then constituted, but did seem to suggest that expansion of university related activities should only occur on the Cowperthwaite/Grant Streets block. Twenty years later the question is again posed as to what city policy should be for Area 6.

Land Use Policy 6 suggests that densities allowed on the central campuses of the universities should be sufficient to accommodate needed expansion and thus not encourage expansion of academic activities into new territory in neighborhoods and commercial districts. See the discussion for Area 1, which is as relevant to Area 6.

Area 6, but less so for Area 1, lies at the very edge of the University's core residential campus. In the past there seemed to be an expectation that the campus would sweep away the small, frame dwelling neighborhood as the campus expanded. It is a logical location for that to happen. However, despite the current zoning envelope, Area 6 has preserved a character over the past twenty years that has come to be viewed more favorably with time by its residents and the city more generally. The right choice for the future is not nearly as clear as it may have been in 1943, 1960 or 1981. At this new juncture in time the majority of the Committee endorses preservation and enhancement of the exist-

ing pattern of low scale housing over expansion of the University campus.

Institutional Policy 53 addresses the loss of tax revenue through conversion of tax paying property to tax exempt uses. It is very possible that the University's plan for the vacant parcels in Area 6 would be tax paying affiliate housing. The current tax status of the vacant lots is not known.

Urban Design Policy 59 urges that land use and zoning regulations reflect the city's urban design and environmental objectives. In the Residence C -3 district the Citywide Rezoning Petition would impose minimal transition requirements for some development over 25,000 square feet and would require project review for projects of 50,000 square feet or more where they abut a public street. The Citywide Growth Management Advisory Committee recognized that those measures were not sufficient to manage transitions along Banks Street. That area was therefore identified as one requiring further study.

The purpose of this rezoning exercise is to look more comprehensively at the issues than even contemplated by the Citywide Committee. Several, quite different urban design futures can be envisioned for this location. Each has merit but with quite different physical implications.

Urban Design Policy 62 addresses the need to provide adequate transitions between differing scales and kinds of development. The higher densities permitted now in the Area 6 complicate any effort to develop compatibly with adjacent neighborhood blocks across Banks Street and within the area itself between existing homes likely to remain and new development possible in the future.

The Committee has chosen to take its lead from the development on the east side of Banks Street and the existing pattern within the Area, not the institutional development along DeWolfe and Cowperthwaite Streets.

Open Space Policy 69 identifies as a valuable asset to the city as a whole private open space, whether accessible or not, and urges its protection. See the discussion in Area 1.

*Previous Planning Initiatives.* The Banks Street interface was identified as a critical transition area by the Citywide Growth Management Advisory Committee.